

Echo

Last ditch bid to halt traveller evictions

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By Jon Austin

TRAVELLERS could leave Dale Farm without a fight, but only if a smaller group is allowed to stay in the borough.

Face-to-face talks between traveller representatives and council officials were held yesterday in the hope of avoiding a £13million eviction of the illegal site in Crays Hill.

The talks in Westminster, chaired and arranged by [Basildon](#) and [Billericay](#) Tory MP [John Baron](#), left a glimmer of hope for a peaceful solution. In the first sign of a resolution, travellers have agreed to move the majority of the 96 families to two or three sites outside the borough.

In return, they want the council to give favourable consideration to a planning application being prepared for a 15-pitch site on Homes and Communities Agency land at Pound Lane, Laindon.

Grattan Puxon said: "Council leader [Tony Ball](#) has agreed to give

favourable consideration to a Dale Farm and Gypsy Council application for a 15-caravan site at Laindon, although this could be changed to another piece of Homes and Communities Agency land, in return for an undertaking to find locations outside Basildon for other families from Dale Farm.”

He said the site would feature a children’s play area and meeting centre for the elderly.

Mr Ball said no deal was in place and any application for a site would have to go through the proper planning process.

However, Mr Ball did say for the first time that some travellers could stay.

He said: “They wanted to discuss other possible sites within the borough, but this is subject to the council’s normal planning regulations. There can be no special deals.

“If the majority of people move outside the borough, then we would consider a small site within the borough.”

Another suggestion, of the council buying Dale Farm off the travellers for up to £2million, was dismissed.

The group, which included Crays Hill residents, will meet again in a month.

Mr Baron said: “This was an earnest attempt on our part to avoid confrontation while ensuring the law is enforced. The travellers are now considering this.”

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